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ABSTRACT

This study examined the fatherhood experiences of 50 low-income, urban, African American fathers and father figures whose children were enrolled in an Early Head Start Program. Information was gathered via qualitative interviews conducted within participants' homes and communities and participant observation. Quantitative methods were used to examine demographic data. This allowed for in-depth exploration of participants' paternal role experiences, thus providing insight into the complexity and range of their attitudes, values and behaviors. Several key findings emerged from interviews with the fathers and father figures: the importance of emotional engagement in their expectations of fatherhood, the impact of economic barriers on their ideals of fatherhood, the effect of racism, and the absence of their own biological fathers and its impact. The most important finding was that the fathers and father figures were actively involved in their children's lives, often using the phrase "being there" (i.e., nurturing and providing financially for their children) to succinctly define what a good father was. The implementation of policies that are comprehensive enough to address the interrelated sequels of poor health, chronic joblessness, welfare dependency, poverty, and the related family provider role problems is recommended. (Contains 33 references.) (SM)

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BEING THERE: EXPLORING THE FATHERHOOD EXPERIENCES AND BELIEFS OF LOW-INCOME URBAN AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

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Being There: Exploring the Fatherhood Experiences and Beliefs of Low-Income Urban African American Males

Abstract

Traditionally, empirical research on low-income African American fathers focused on the pathological consequences of fathers' absence from the family or on the dysfunctional lower-class single-parent household and the "black matriarchy." An overuse of the deficit (i.e., father absence) and mother-focused research models have restricted knowledge about the fatherhood experiences of African American men. Thus, there is a significant gap in our understanding of their experiences and the importance of these men in African American family life. Studies that relied heavily upon these models have often led researchers, practitioners, and policy makers to view the African American family as "pathological" or "deviant" because of the high rate of father absence. This deficit-oriented approach ignored the essential fact that many African American fathers, including men in low-income families, are highly involved with their children.

This study provides important information about the experiences of fatherhood among low-income urban African American fathers and father figures whose children are enrolled in the Early Head Start (EHS) program of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. An exploratory research approach was employed to gather information from these men using qualitative interviews conducted within their own environment (e.g., home and community). This approach used qualitative and ethnographic methods (e.g., participant observation) predominately; however, certain quantitative methods were used to examine demographic data. This allowed for an in-depth exploration of the paternal role experiences of the fathers of this study, thus providing insight into the complexity and range of their attitudes, values, and behaviors. From these interviews, several key findings emerged: 1.) The impact of economic barriers on the EHS fathers' and father figures' ideals of fatherhood; 2.) The effect of racism on these men; and, 3.) The absence of the EHS fathers' and father figures'

biological fathers and its impact. However, the most important finding of this study is that the EHS fathers and father figures are actively involved in their children's lives often using the phrase "being there" (i.e., nurturing and providing financially for their children) to succinctly define what a "good" father is. This study suggests the implementation of policies that are comprehensive enough to address the interrelated sequels of poor health, chronic joblessness, welfare dependency, poverty, and the related family provider role problems. These policies could, therefore, encourage more cooperative family support from low-income urban African American fathers as well as mothers.

Background

The majority of empirical research on African American fathers has focused on the pathological consequences of fathers' absence from the family or on the dysfunctional lower-class single-parent household and the "black matriarchy" (Bright & Williams, 1996; Fagan, 1998; Mirande, 1991; Wade, 1994). Knowledge about the fatherhood experience of African American men has been restricted by an overuse of the deficit and matriarchy models; thus, limiting the understanding and meaning these men attribute to fatherhood. Studies that relied heavily upon these models have often led researchers, practitioners, and policy makers to view the African American family as "pathological" or "deviant" because of the high rate of father absence. This deficit-oriented approach

ignored the essential fact that many African American fathers, including men in low- income families, are highly involved with their children (Fagan, 1998; Furstenberg, 1995).

In spite of a heightened awareness about the importance of fathers and their effect on the lives and well being of their children (Dallas & Chen, 1998), little is known about low-income urban African American fathers' lived experience of fatherhood. Also, little attention has been given to the many African American fathers who are an integral part of their families' lives, often visiting their children on a daily basis even if they have moved out of the child's home (Fagan, 1996). The erroneous conclusion drawn in the research literature is that African American fathers have abandoned their position in the family (Bright & Williams, 1996) and are unimportant members of the family system; hence, "invisible" (Cochran, 1997b). Connor (1988) concluded that the depictions of father absence effects in some families might be accurate; however, these depictions are not representative of African American families in general. Such simplistic portrayals of "father absence" have failed to take into account factors such as socioeconomic status, the supportive extended-family network,

institutional racism and the effects of discrimination on African American fatherhood.

Theoretical Framework

According to Cochran (1997a), there are certain considerations that should be part of any theoretical framework when studying African American fathers. Cochran's considerations can be used to study fathers from any racial or ethnic group. However, she focused on African American fathers. Thus, a theoretical framework for studying African American fathers should: 1.) Reflect the cultural values and patterns of their families and communities; 2.) Reflect their experiences according to their political, educational, and socioeconomic backgrounds; 3.) Consider the diverse roles these men hold in the family; 4.) Provide an understanding of paternal role expectations from the perspective of the men, their families, communities, and society at large; and, 5.) Be sensitive to changes (e.g., developmental, physical) that occur and the impact they have on the paternal role. A theoretical framework (e.g., ecological theory) that is flexible enough to address these issues may lead to a more comprehensive understanding of African American men's parenting experiences.

Ecological Theory

An ecological approach allows researchers to develop methods of observing African American families and the paternal role of African American men within the social, cultural, and historic context in which it occurs. It allows for an analysis of a father's behavior according to the value system of his indigenous culture or subculture and provides a more balanced picture of his role within the African American family (Peters, 1988).

Ecological theory considers the context within which these men play the roles of provider, protector, shared decision-maker, socializer, and supporter of their spouses, while identifying and elucidating any supports and barriers to these roles. In addition, the approach emphasizes examining the patterns of socialization and instrumental fathering competencies based on cultural formulae, which are central to the values, beliefs, and skills of African American fathers within their specific culture (Ahmeduzzaman & Roopnarine, 1992; McAdoo, 1993; Peters, 1988). Further, the theory helps one to describe, explain, and predict the effects of racial discrimination in education and employment as well as experiences related to social isolation on the roles of African American men in their families.

The ecological approach yields rich, scholarly language that describes African American fathers' experiences, capabilities, and contributions in their own cultural context. Instead of using a comparative theoretical framework—comparing ethnic groups or classes based on white middle-class standards—ecological theory allows researchers to gain an understanding of African American fathers in a less biased manner and in their own terms (McAdoo, 1993).

Ecological Model

The ecological model aids in viewing a particular phenomenon in its totality with all of its complexities rather than examining an issue from the perspective of one discipline (Bubolz, Eicher, & Sontag, 1979). Figure 1 represents the ecological model used in this study and is an adaptation of the human ecosystems model of Bubolz et al., (1979). The ecological model gives attention to the spatial dimension or ecosystem of African American fathers in relation to their environment and also takes into account the cultures and values that influence their relationships and adjustments to and modification of their environment. The model goes beyond a primary concern with social organization or the community as a major focus in human ecology (Bubolz et al.,

1979) to identifying the impact of a multiplicity of external forces in society on African American fathers within their family contexts (Hill, 1997).

The ecological model consists of three central organizing concepts: human environed unit, environment, and the interactions and transactions between them (Andrews, Bubolz, & Paolucci, 1980; Billingsley, 1968). The human environed unit (HEU) is the African American father embedded within a network of mutually interdependent relationships with his family, community, and society. The human environed unit can be either an individual father or a group of fathers who share common goals, values, and interests; feelings of unity; and have some sense of a common identity (Bubolz et al., 1979), with different configurations of age, marital status, and familial living arrangements.

An environment is the sum total of the physical, biological, social, cultural, economic, political, aesthetic, and structural surroundings of fathers (Andrews et al., 1980; Bubolz et al., 1979). Each of these dimensions (and their mutual interactions) provides the basis for African American fathers' existence and furnishes the resources necessary for life. The ecological model consists of three

conceptually distinct but interrelated environments: familial, community, and societal.

The familial environment (FE) includes the fathers' biophysical behaviors (e.g., physical presence), psychological behaviors (e.g., roles, thoughts, and emotions), and social behaviors (e.g., interaction between fathers and others). Also, within this environment are the fathers' familial groupings, i.e., nuclear, single parent, kin networks, friends, and intentional couples. Each of these can be identified and their adaptability and effect on the environment examined (Andrews et al., 1980).

The community environment (CE) is defined as the physical locality (e.g., public housing) in which the fathers reside. Within the CE are: schools, churches, community-based groups/centers, newspapers, small businesses (e.g., barber shops/hair salons, convenience stores), and various organized systems of hustling (e.g., "Jitney Service"—using one's car to transport others for a nominal fee) (Billingsley, 1968; Hill, 1997).

The wider societal environment (SE) is composed of people and organizations outside the community environment. SE can also be defined by institutional policies. These policies are in the areas of economics, technology, welfare, education, health, law, and the

media (Billingsley, 1968; Hill, 1997). These policies can individually and collectively shape attitudes, values, expectations, role perceptions, and patterns of decision making of African American fathers (Andrews et al., 1980).

The third component of the ecological model is interaction—the reciprocal influence or an interaction between the fathers (HEU) and their environment. Interaction occurs when any part of the model influences or acts on another part and is influenced by or acted on in return. Interaction can take place between the fathers and their environment(s), within the fathers, and among the environments (Andrews et al., 1980; Bubolz et al., 1979).

Methodology

The research literature and theoretical perspectives on the paternal role experiences of low-income urban African American fathers are limited. Therefore, the employment of an exploratory research design was deemed most appropriate. As Babbie (1983) indicates, an area that is relatively new or has not been the subject of research can be appropriately studied using an exploratory approach. This approach allows for the use of descriptive

qualitative and quantitative techniques for data collection (Miller, 1994).

Through the use of a qualitative methodology supplemented with certain ethnographic techniques (e.g., participant observation and ethnographic interviewing), data concerning the fathers of this study were obtained that reflect the depth and breath of their paternal role experiences. The data obtained through this strategy can be later used to generate hypotheses that can be examined through the use of structured survey techniques (McAllister, Mulvey, Green, & Butler, 1998; Miller, 1994). Quantitative data utilized in this study examined the impact of certain demographic variables (e.g., age, employment status) on paternal role experiences.

Sample

A convenience sample of 50 low-income urban African American fathers participated in this study; thus allowing for the collection and analysis of the fathers' data in a diversity of circumstances and to expend the necessary time to explore in considerable depth the paternal role experiences of these men. The average age of the fathers was 28 years, with a range from 18 to 66 years of age. Most

of the men were employed at the time of interview. One father was retired from his job and responsible for his grandson's daily childcare while his daughter attended a local community college. The men in this study appeared to have entered fatherhood without preparation or planning. With only a few exceptions, they did not decide to become fathers when they did. Fatherhood was something that "just happened" to them.

The children of the fathers were enrolled in the Early Head Start (EHS) national evaluation and under the age of three years. EHS provides early, intensive, comprehensive and continuous services to families with children under age three in low-income communities. The mothers of these children identified either the child's biological father or a father figure as a man involved in the child's life. All of the fathers consented to be participants in one or more of the following components of the EHS research: 1.) Interviews with fathers of newborns, 2.) Interviews with fathers of two-year-olds, 3.) Interviews with fathers participating in a local pilot study, and 4.) Interviews with case study fathers.

Data Collection, Measurement Development and Interview Process

Data were collected from the EHS fathers using existing national and local EHS research instruments and procedures. Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. of Princeton, New Jersey, developed the interview instrument used in the fathers of newborns in collaboration with Dr. Michael Lamb of the National Institute for Child Health and Development (NICHD) in Rockville, Maryland. This component of the study involved multiple interviews with and participant observation of the fathers of newborns. Mathematica Policy Research, Inc also developed the interview instrument used for fathers of two-year-olds. Dr. Beth Green, Department of Psychology, Portland State University and Dr. Chris Keane, Graduate School of Public Health, University of Pittsburgh developed the local fathers' pilot study instrument. The instrument examined four key areas of fatherhood: parenting, child development, stress, and social support.

Interview Process

The structured interviews from each of the four components of the Early Head Start (EHS) research began at different times over a two year period. Information gathered from these interviews is

supplemented by in-depth ethnographic interviews with three case study families and participant observations at the time of interview in the home, during group activities at community centers, and while attending social events (e.g., dinners at local restaurants). The author conducted all interviews with fathers of newborns and case study fathers and half of the interviews with fathers of two-year-olds and pilot study fathers. Three other EHS researchers conducted the remaining half of the interviews. What follows is the timeline for each of the four EHS research components:

1. Fathers of newborns: Interviews began in April 1998 and were completed in February 1999. Four of the fathers were interviewed in their homes, and one father was interviewed while incarcerated and at a local community center upon release. All interviews (n=5) were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.

2. Fathers of two-year-olds: Interviews for this component began in June 1998 and were completed in May 1999. All interviews (n=18) were audiotaped and conducted in the homes of the fathers. The audiotaped interviews were subsequently transcribed verbatim.

3. Local fathers' pilot study: From April 1997 to July 1997, 24 African American fathers were interviewed for a pilot fathers' study. All interviews were conducted in the fathers' homes. The responses to the open-ended questions were hand written on the instrument. No audiotapes of these interviews were made.

4. Case study father interviews: Case study ethnographic interviews were ongoing, beginning in September 1997 and ending April 1999. Three fathers participated as members of case study families. All case study father interviews were conducted in the homes of these men. These interviews (n=3) were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

In consideration of the methodology, sample size, and research instruments, qualitative content analysis was used to determine themes and patterns of thought and behavior across the four components of the EHS research. These patterns were repeated in various situations (e.g., being incarcerated versus being a custodial father) and with the various players (e.g., fathers of a newborns and fathers of two-year-olds). The goal was to determine the specific qualities, traits, "meaning units" or connotations the men attributed to being an African American father. Data analysis involved the following steps: 1.) Transcribing, sifting through, and broadly classifying the verbatim data; 2.) Transforming similar ideas into specific, discernable categories; and then, 3.) Reapplying the established categories to additional interview data, to determine if the categories were relevant, necessary, and sufficient in

capturing the totality of the data (Bright & Williams, 1996; Fetterman, 1998; Schwartzberg, 1996).

Major Findings

The Importance of Emotional Engagement in EHS Fathers' Expectations of Fatherhood

Emotional engagement, as a key finding of this study, must be viewed within the context of both past social science research on African American fathers. Emotional engagement to the EHS fathers is exhibiting outward physical expressions of love (e.g., touching and kissing) and the inward feelings of warmth and compassion toward their children.

Previous studies on African American fathers have reported these men as being uninterested and uninvolved in the day-to-day care and development of their children. The fathers were viewed as emotionally detached from their children and their families often demonstrating their manhood in the streets rather than in the home. In addition, the popular media portrayed African American fathers as unloving and uncaring which has contributed to perpetuating and reinforcing negative stereotypical images of these men. In

contrast to the emotionally disengaged stereotype of African American fathers, the EHS fathers believe emotional engagement is an important component of fatherhood. These men display outward expressions of love and affection in an attempt to show their children they are welcome and wanted and not intrusions.

The EHS fathers intend to remain emotionally involved despite any past or current negative paternal experiences and frequently use the phrase "being there"—emotionally, materially, and physically for their children—to give meaning to the term fatherhood. Emotional engagement, as a finding of this study, is consistent with those of other studies (see Fagan, 1996 and Price-Bonham & Skeen, 1979) which contend that African American fathers, like their white counterparts, tend to be warm, supportive, and emotionally expressive with their children. This finding is contrary to the popularly held view of African American fathers as being distant, aloof, and emotionally detached from their children.

The Impact of Economic Barriers on the EHS Fathers' Ideals of Fatherhood

The EHS fathers encounter significant social and economic barriers in their attempts to realize their own ideals of fatherhood. The societal environment (SE) and the interactions between the

fathers and SE of the ecological model illustrate this finding. In particular, lack of financial opportunities, poverty, underemployment, and unemployment has individually and collectively impacted the fathers' experience, definition, and ability to fulfill the paternal role.

In order to fully understand the impact of economic barriers on the EHS fathers' ideals of fatherhood, it is important to examine this finding within the context of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania's industrial and manufacturing history and the precipitous decline of industry during the 1980s. As Wilson (1996) points out, the decline of the mass production system and the decreasing availability of lower-skilled blue-collar jobs has adversely affected the employment rates and earnings of low-skilled African American men, many of whom are concentrated in urban areas like Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

An economic expansion touched off by World War II forced the area's industries to open up jobs in the steel mills to a number of African American males. This led to a migratory wave of African Americans from the southern United States to Pittsburgh and also a historic dependence by local African American families on the income generated from jobs in the steel

mills (Glasco, 1989). Unfortunately, these jobs in the steel mills would eventually begin to disappear. A notable trend during the 1970s that was experienced in many industrial and manufacturing regions of the United States began to be seen in Pittsburgh—deindustrialization. Divestment in the United States steel industry, and its virtual collapse in Pittsburgh during the early 1980s, has reshaped the entire picture of employment throughout Allegheny County (McAllister, 1993).

Many of the jobs in the steel mills have now disappeared forcing the EHS fathers to compete for the few remaining jobs in the service industries. Recently, the job growth in these industries has been about the slowest for any large county in the nation. The remaining jobs in the county tend to be the low paying, part-time ones, devoid of fringe benefits, that are found in fast food restaurants, convenience stores, and nursing homes. Because of the low levels of job growth, deindustrialization, and unemployment, the EHS fathers are faced with fewer opportunities for economic mobility and even fewer resources with which to support their families and are forced to live in poverty. This has caused many of the fathers to rely on the help from others—family, friends, and largely on public assistance.

The majority of the EHS fathers reside in public housing. These somewhat isolated, large scale public housing developments can contribute to employment problems among the fathers by limiting access to job information, adequate child care, and transportation, according to Bangs and Hong (1996). As Wilson (1987) notes, the poorer the neighborhood, the more prevalent the joblessness. The neighborhoods and communities the fathers reside in tend to offer fewer "legitimate" economic opportunities, inadequate job information networks, and poor schools that lead to the disappearance of work. The fathers have a desire to provide economically and practically (e.g., adequate housing) for their families. But, they cannot due to "no jobs in the area that pay well," as one father stated. The fact is there are only a few remaining jobs in mass-production/industry in the area.

Thus, the solution for the economic barriers encountered by the EHS fathers is not more government programs, but rather a matter of addressing the: 1.) Overall lack of employment opportunities in Allegheny County; 2.) Increasing the types and amount of education and job training opportunities; and, 3.) The public transportation system that does not service the outlying areas of the county—where a number of the

industrial/manufacturing jobs is located. Until these issues are addressed, these men will not be able to fulfil their expectations of providing economically and practically for their families. In the absence of regular employment, life, including the family life of these men, becomes less coherent. Persistent unemployment and irregular employment hinder rational planning in daily life, the necessary condition of adaptation to an industrial economy (Wilson, 1996).

The Effect of Racism on the EHS Fathers

The declining number of employment opportunities is not the sole reason for he alarming rate of poverty among the EHS fathers. Racism has a deleterious effect on the economic viability of these men and their families. Discrimination coupled with the changing structure of Allegheny County's labor market has excluded the EHS fathers from substantial employment opportunities. In the highest-risk group for unemployment are the younger EHS fathers, who perceive that they are foiled in employment opportunities because of their race or lack of skills. As Wilson et al., (1995b) report, in the last twenty five years, young African American fathers who are unemployed have quadrupled, while

unemployment for young white fathers has remained somewhat constant.

The issue of race prompts the EHS fathers to speak of a deep sense of commitment to finding employment, moving out of public housing, formally educating their children, and teaching their children about African American and familial culture and history. The fathers believe this will aid in reducing some of the angst and depression they feel. Some of the fathers are optimistic about finding employment and want to "pull [themselves] up by [their] bootstraps." However, they are confronted with the idea they are unwelcome to live in certain neighborhoods. They have the desire to rise or "get up" from poverty via employment opportunities but are "knocked down" by the societal barriers of racism and discrimination in the job market and in housing.

The racism issue for the EHS fathers is societal and not individual and must be addressed at the American societal level. Researchers, policy makers, and practitioners must fight to protect the basic, inalienable rights of low-income African American fathers—equal access to education, adequate housing, affordable medical care, and equal economic opportunity. It is expected this will lead to bold and imaginative initiatives to address the

conditions of inequality and injustice faced by African American fathers in general and the EHS fathers of this study, in particular.

The Absence of the EHS Fathers' Biological Fathers and its Impact

To many of the men in this study, their biological father's absence and abandonment was a common occurrence. It is not clear from the interviews with the EHS fathers as to the reasons for their natal fathers' absence and abandonment. However, the decline and dismantling of the steel industry occurred when the fathers of this study were small boys and their fathers were in need of jobs. Thus, it was the EHS fathers' natal families, and especially their fathers, who were most immediately affected by deindustrialization. This could account for the biological father absence and abandonment that the EHS fathers' experienced. The EHS fathers' grandfathers were, therefore, the ones who had many years of steady work in the steel mills. This finding can account for the fact that they were better able to fulfill the role of father figure than their own sons, the EHS fathers' biological fathers. Feelings of no longer being able to provide financially and practically, may have contributed to the EHS fathers' biological fathers physically leaving the homes

and lives of their families which were then left to be headed by females.

Notwithstanding, the EHS fathers are committed to remain involved in their children's lives in spite of their past experiences with their fathers. The EHS fathers appear emotionally involved in their children's lives—even when they have to physically leave their children's homes. With their biological fathers gone, from whom did they learn their "adult male" and "fathering" skills? To many of the men of this study, father figures (grandfathers and stepfathers) were their primary role models along with the EHS fathers' biological mothers. Both father figures and mothers were the "teachers" of practical skills—washing/ironing clothes and driving a car—and racial and ethnic heritage. The EHS fathers plan on "passing on" these practical skills and a sense of cultural pride to their children.

Discussion

Limitations

The open-ended and exploratory nature of this study allowed for the accumulation and analysis of rich paternal information and in-depth examinations of each father's unique experience. This study

examined the paternal role experiences of the EHS fathers within their own sociohistoric, cultural, and physical contexts—home and community. The study fathers were not compared to other ethnic or cultural groups and the mother's account of their role was not obtained. Therefore, the methodological limitations (e.g., mother focus and comparative-deficit) of previous research on African American fathers were not a part of this study.

Nevertheless, there are limitations of this study. First, the use of a convenience sample limits the ability to readily generalize the study findings. Caution must be exercised in generalizing these findings—Allegheny County, Pennsylvania is not representative of the entire nation. The sample population tended to be young not educated beyond high school, and with small families (one or two children).

Second, there is the issue of validity concerning the descriptive information given by the EHS fathers. These men were aware they would be interviewed at various times before the EHS child's third birthday, which might have prompted them to behave and respond in a manner they thought the interviewers wanted them to. However, rapport was developed between the author and the fathers during the interview sessions, at social events, during

fathers' meetings at the EHS research sites, and while walking through the fathers' neighborhoods and communities making formal and informal home visits. This process encouraged the fathers to become comfortable, share their experiences, and reveal information usually unavailable to those outside of their inner circle of family and friends. The process ultimately conveyed to the EHS fathers that their relationship with the author was respected and valued and any information provided was valid.

Implications/Suggestions

Poor health—physical, psychological, and social—has been linked to poverty. Improving incomes and social conditions would enhance the overall health status of low-income urban African American fathers and their families. Even researchers, policy makers, and practitioners who espouse the importance of personal health practices (e.g., smoking cessation, diet and exercise) have to question whether improved incomes and social conditions will do more for health outcomes than medical interventions or health education alone. Therefore, the formulation of policies and interventions that move beyond the "victim blaming" of individual fathers for their actions to those that target and focus on the

structural aspects (e.g., institutional racism) of poverty are essential.

It is difficult to change practices (e.g., inability to provide financially and materially) without changing circumstances (e.g., chronic joblessness) at the societal level. Thus, responsive employment/training and industrial policies are needed to directly address the differential impact of deindustrialization on chronic joblessness among African American men. Policy initiatives must be comprehensive enough to address the interrelated sequels of chronic joblessness, welfare dependency, and related family provider role problems that result from rapid displacement of many African American fathers within the postindustrial labor market. For example, viable work-sharing policies could encourage more cooperative family support from employed African American fathers as well as from mothers (Bowman, 1993).

Future Studies

Because fatherhood is a lifelong experience, the research literature would be enhanced by an exploration of how the paternal role and the definition of fatherhood change over time. Future studies on African American fathers would benefit by employing longitudinal designs to follow these men for a specific period. Such designs

would give researchers an opportunity to understand the significance of age, maturity, marital status, and life changes (i.e., employment, education, number of children) on the fathers' perception of fatherhood. The themes and outcomes that emerge from African American fathers participating in this type of research may prove invaluable in developing a fuller understanding of them.

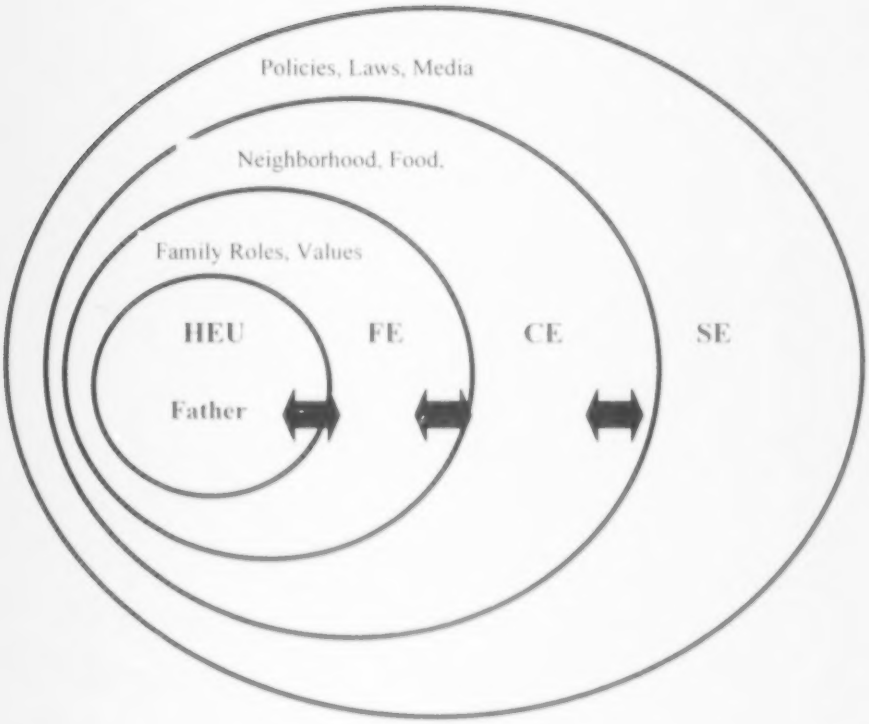

Figure 1: Ecological Model

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